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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

**DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE**

4 October 1985

**NICARAGUA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY STRATEGY (C NF)****Summary**

The Sandinistas' public diplomacy strategy is aimed at discrediting the armed insurgents, undermining US policy in Central America, and preserving critical political and economic ties with Latin America and Western Europe. At the same time, it is intended to defend the regime against charges of human rights abuses, domestic political repression and economic mismanagement. Using well-focused propaganda themes and a range of dissemination techniques, the Sandinistas have, in our view, successfully exploited inherent suspicions of US intentions, despite growing foreign disillusionment with Managua. Given these successes, we foresee the Sandinistas maintaining their basic propaganda thrust, but developments in Nicaragua and the region offer the regime both new opportunities and challenges [redacted]

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We believe the Sandinistas see the next few months as critical in containing the rebels and convincing both the US public and the Congress that even with US funding the guerrillas cannot win or force policy changes in Managua. They therefore have to

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This Memorandum was requested by the staff of the National Security Council. Information as of 3 October was used in the preparation of this paper. It was prepared by [redacted] Middle America Caribbean Division, Office of African and Latin American Analysis, and was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Questions and comments may be directed to the Chief, Middle America Caribbean Division, ALA [redacted]

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convince their audiences that continued US backing for the insurgents only prolongs the devastation of the war and heightens the risk of direct US involvement in coming months. The Sandinistas will undoubtedly trumpet their new constitution as democratic progress. They will lobby hard to internationalize the Central American situation, having achieved some success with the formation of the Contadora support group in South America. Managua reportedly will use the likely favorable decision from the International Court of Justice regarding its charges against the United States for propaganda purposes and to request action by the UN. The Sandinistas next will work to engage more actively the Europeans, either individually or via the EC. Finally, the new governments in Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala are likely to be subjected to a blitz of diplomatic peace initiatives [REDACTED]

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The Sandinistas' public diplomacy effort is a vital tool for achieving key foreign policy objectives, such as discrediting the armed insurgents, marshalling international pressure on Washington to change its policies in Central America, preserving support in Latin America and Western Europe, and defending the regime against charges of human rights abuses, political repression, and economic mismanagement. To this end, the Sandinistas have controlled information at home while developing a sophisticated apparatus for disseminating propaganda abroad, including the use of media, leftist solidarity groups, and personal diplomacy. [REDACTED]

#### Recurrent Propaganda Themes

Discrediting the Rebels. The armed insurgency is a priority target for Sandinista propagandists, who seek to discourage political and material support for the rebels from non-US sources and to build international pressure on Washington to cut off aid. The regime portrays the insurgents as US-backed mercenaries with no popular base in Nicaragua and claims that the largest rebel group--the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN)--is dominated by members of former President Anastasio Somoza's hated National Guard. Further, the regime alleges that the rebels are responsible for over \$1 billion in damage to economic targets that has cost thousands of Nicaraguan jobs and lives, as well as hindered economic development. The Sandinistas also frequently report that significant numbers of insurgents--nearly 2,000 in the past two years--have accepted offers of amnesty [REDACTED]

Allegations of human rights abuses against prisoners of war and civilians has also been a potent propaganda weapon against the rebels. Government newspapers constantly report attacks on farming cooperatives and civilian truck convoys, as well as routine kidnappings of peasants by roving bands of rebels. [REDACTED]

Testimony by civilian victims and defectors and occasional photographs of insurgent executions lend credibility to Sandinista accusations. [REDACTED]

Undercutting the US. The Sandinistas have long viewed Washington as their most important adversary. In addition to holding the US responsible for human rights violations, they maintain that Washington seeks a military solution to regional problems. As evidence they point to:

- US aid to the anti-Sandinista insurgents, focusing most recently on the US Congressional vote in June to provide non-lethal assistance to the rebels. They accuse President Reagan of "war-mongering" and supporting state terrorism, and they have chastised Congress for its lack of independence.
- The threat of a US invasion. The Sandinistas portray themselves as besieged by the US, pointing to the frequent presence of US naval combatants off both

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Nicaraguan coasts, joint military maneuvers with Honduras, and military training for Costa Rican security forces. The Sandinistas also claim that the Foley Amendment--intended to limit the President's power to insert US combat forces in Nicaragua--provides the administration with clear "pretexts" for launching an invasion.

- Washington's refusal to resume direct negotiations with Managua. The Sandinistas blame the US for the impasse in last year's Manzanillo talks and have repeatedly asked for a resumption of the talks, arguing that Washington's position underscores its desire for a military solution to regional problems.

The alleged role of the CIA in the region is another aspect of Sandinista propaganda. In 1983, the regime presented two prisoners it claimed were involved in a CIA plot to assassinate several high-ranking Sandinista officials. Managua also blamed the CIA for an assassination attempt against rebel leader Eden Pastora in May 1984, and the "CIA guerrilla manual" controversy last fall provided considerable grist for Managua's public diplomacy effort. In May, the Sandinista press claimed that the CIA was training commandos in Panama to carry out attacks against embassies throughout Central America in an effort to turn international opinion against Managua. In mid-July, Sandinista security officials publicized the "discovery" of the "CIA's Black Eagle Plan," which called for using Indian rebels to carry out terrorist attacks.

The Sandinistas also blame US policy, primarily the trade restrictions imposed in early May, for Nicaragua's chronic economic problems. Calling the embargo an attack on all Nicaraguans and a violation of international law, the regime charged it was another step toward military intervention. Seeking to elicit international sympathy, the Minister of Health proclaimed that the restrictions would deny Nicaraguan children vital medicines, even though the embargo did not apply to health products. The refusal of the US to sell badly needed fertilizers and pesticides has also been blamed for poor crop production this year. Indeed, President Ortega has accused Washington of using chemical and biological weapons to bring on the current dengue fever epidemic and a serious cotton blight. The Sandinistas have cited the necessity of replacing lost US markets and combating Washington's "economic warfare" to justify closer ties with the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc.

Nicaragua as Democratic Peacemaker. The Sandinistas portray themselves as committed to political pluralism and a regional peace settlement. Regime leaders point to the pluralistic character of the draft constitution, participation in open forums with government officials, the existence of independent newspaper La Prensa, and their tolerance of illegal opposition political parties as evidence of their commitment to democratic government. Further, they publicize government meetings with Church, business, and political opposition leaders. The large pro-government vote in the November election and huge government-sponsored rallies and marches are also cited as evidence of the regime's popularity. Managua uses the insurgency to justify the three-year old state of emergency, which provides the legal basis for press censorship. The Sandinistas also are quick to refute charges of human rights abuses, claiming that the allegations are made by malcontents and defectors who are paid CIA informants.

Nicaragua has tried to appear flexible in the Contadora peace talks, blaming the US and other Central American countries for hindering progress. The Sandinistas have touted their willingness to sign the September 1984 draft treaty--which was highly favorable to Nicaraguan interests--and in early 1985 announced a unilateral moratorium on the acquisition of new weapons systems and a decision to send 100 Cuban military advisers back home as evidence of their desire to reach agreement. Managua claims Washington has used its influence over Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica to impose unacceptable and unjustifiable conditions on Nicaragua [redacted]

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#### The Sandinista Propaganda Network

Control over the media in Nicaragua, promoting solidarity with leftists abroad, and foreign leadership travel have been the most effective methods for disseminating Nicaraguan views. [redacted]

Controlling the Information Flow. Sandinista dominance over the media is vital in obscuring internal dissent from outside view, giving international coverage to Sandinista positions, and enabling the government to exploit propaganda opportunities. The regime owns two of the three newspapers with a nationwide circulation, both television stations, two powerful radio stations, and a network of smaller ones. The remaining newspaper, La Prensa, and the few independent radio stations are subjected to prior censorship. According to US Embassy reporting, sometimes as much as 60 percent of La Prensa's material is proscribed. The government also selectively prohibits the rebroadcasts of masses by Cardinal Obando y Bravo, an outspoken critic of the regime. With such tight control, the regime can control information project the impression of broad popular backing, and carefully orchestrate its response to US policy initiatives. Dominance over the media also facilitates the government's frequent disinformation efforts, according to US Embassy [redacted]

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The Sandinistas gradually have expanded the structures for dissemination of propaganda abroad. The pro-Sandinista Nicaraguan Journalists Union, for example, is associated with similar leftist organizations in Latin America and maintains ties with counterparts in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Cuba. The New Nicaraguan News Agency--publicly acknowledged to be pro-government--competes with other wire services in disseminating stories abroad. The extensive Cuban press service, Prensa Latina, also helps to disseminate pro-Nicaraguan stories, according to various sources. The official Sandinista newspaper, Barricada, publishes a monthly international edition in English and Spanish, and a bilingual monthly magazine is devoted to sensationalist stories, anti-Americanism, and personal attacks on US officials [redacted]

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Promoting Leftist Solidarity. Managua places particular emphasis on promoting solidarity committees in foreign countries in order to spread favorable information about [redacted]

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Nicaragua, develop political and financial support, and mobilize pressure on other governments to criticize US policies. Solidarity committees in Latin America and Western Europe have mounted vigils and demonstrations, organized letter writing campaigns, collected clothing and money for Nicaragua, placed newspaper advertisements, and mobilized contingents of international volunteers to visit Nicaragua. Last July, Managua hosted delegates from the various international solidarity committees to discuss strategy, according to press reports. The Sandinistas also sponsor seminars in Nicaragua and other countries to provide forums to strengthen ties with leftists, according to the US Embassy. Their support for the so-called "popular church" in Nicaragua has also attracted the support of liberation theologians throughout the Third World. [REDACTED]

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The Sandinistas have devoted considerable effort to cultivating leftists in Costa Rica and, to a lesser extent, in Honduras. Their objective is to bring pressure on those governments to deny anti-Sandinista guerrillas safehaven and to promote flexibility in the Contadora peace talks. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the Nicaraguan Embassy regularly places advertisements in Costa Rican newspapers to explain Managua's policies and challenge San Jose to demonstrate its independence from the US. The Nicaraguans have placed similar advertisements in the Honduran press and and accuse Honduras of being Washington's puppet, as well as providing some funding to leftist political parties. [REDACTED]

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Diplomatic Efforts. The Sandinistas have used a range of diplomatic initiatives to generate international support. They frequently dispatch high-level delegations abroad to defend Sandinista policies. Vice President Ramirez, for example, toured Western Europe in June and South America in July to explain the regime's position in the Contadora talks. Also, in the wake of the US trade sanctions, Sandinista representatives aggressively presented their case before a range of multilateral organizations, even those only marginally involved in commercial matters, to gain publicity. Moreover, Managua continues to foster support in the Nonaligned Movement and has sustained considerable sympathy for its policies in the United Nations. They have also made propaganda gains from diplomatic protests, especially in calling attention to ongoing Honduran and Costa Rican support for the insurgents. [REDACTED]

#### Propaganda Targets

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The US Market. In our view, the Sandinistas consider US public opinion the most important target for their propaganda and believe they can influence US policy by manipulating public perceptions. [REDACTED]

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The regime also is generally receptive to US journalists and Congressional visitors; indeed such openness becomes a propaganda theme in itself and is contrasted with US denials of visas to a few high-ranking Sandinista officials. These visits, [redacted] are carefully orchestrated to include model schools, factories, and farm cooperatives [redacted]

The Sandinistas appeal to US citizens primarily on moral grounds. Managua constantly reports alleged atrocities committed by US-backed guerrillas and discredits defectors who accuse the regime of similar human rights violations. The Sandinistas also compare Nicaragua to Vietnam, including accusations that the US is supplying the insurgents with a defoliant used in Asia. The regime paints the US President as war-crazed, contemptuous of public opinion, and willing to expend millions of dollars and risk thousands of American lives in a repeat of the Vietnam War [redacted]

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Such appeals are aimed especially at US religious and lay groups. [redacted]

[redacted], they almost certainly welcome--if not sponsor--the now weekly demonstration in front of the US Embassy by US citizens resident in Managua. They also host contingents of private US visitors. Last spring, for example, Managua hosted a group of US entertainers, who they anticipated would become critics of US policy back home, according to press report [redacted]

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In Latin America and Western Europe. In South America, the Sandinistas are concentrating on leaders of the democratic governments as well as leftist politicians and clergy. Their goal has been to generate regional solidarity for their position and against US policy. Managua bases its appeal on traditional Third World themes, including the doctrines of non-intervention and self-determination. They argue that US involvement in Central America poses a threat to all of Latin America and that a Sandinista defeat would set a precedent for future US "aggression" in the region. Regime leaders travel throughout South America to press these views, actively seeking endorsements from Latin American legislatures [redacted]

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In Western Europe, the Sandinistas exploit inherent suspicions of US policy among government leaders. Their goal is to preserve critical political backing and persuade Western leaders to pressure Washington to change its policies. The Nicaraguan diplomatic presence is strong in most countries--in Sweden, for example, there are five resident Nicaraguan diplomats while the other Central American countries are unrepresented, according to the US Embassy. Further, the Sandinistas hold observer status in the Socialist International and devote considerable attention to maintaining its support. In an apparent attempt to evoke additional sympathy, the Sandinistas have likened the alleged atrocities of the insurgents to those committed by the Nazis [redacted]

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### Sandinista Propaganda Effectiveness

The Sandinista propaganda machinery, in our view, effectively brings the regime's message before world public opinion and raises doubts and suspicions about US policy, even when specific accusations appear unfounded. Repeated charges of an imminent US invasion, for example, have exploited fears that US involvement in Central America could result in a repetition of the Vietnam War. The Sandinistas have also been fairly successful in portraying themselves as victims of US intervention, while successfully deflecting charges of human rights abuses and political repression. Further, Nicaragua's case in the International Court of Justice, bolstered by testimony from a rebel defector and other witnesses, has drawn considerable attention to Managua's position. Few attempts are made in the international media to rebut Sandinista allegations or demand proof. Government censorship of the Nicaraguan media helps propaganda efforts by stifling criticism and averting refutation of Sandinista positions. [redacted]

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Equally important, Sandinista propaganda has helped to sustain the doubts some international leaders have about the insurgents and prevented any precipitous drop in international support for Managua. The Sandinistas probably calculate that popular fears about another seemingly endless financial and human commitment has served as a constraint on US policy. In Western Europe the Sandinistas have successfully exploited opposition to US policies to prevent any substantial policy shifts or reductions in economic aid, despite growing disillusionment among some leaders with Managua's policies. In South America, where leaders have fewer illusions about Managua's intentions, the Sandinistas have appealed successfully to long-standing fears of US military intervention and concerns about leftist backlash at home to discourage any major policy shifts [redacted]

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### What to Expect

Given their effectiveness, we believe the Sandinistas will sustain, and probably intensify, the basic thrust of their propaganda themes. Moreover, events in Nicaragua and in the region will offer new opportunities to influence international opinion. Domestically, the Sandinistas have promised to promulgate their new "democratic" Constitution by yearend. Trips to hold "consultations" on their charter have provided ample opportunities to demonstrate a commitment to a pluralistic system of government. In our view, the regime may stage a carefully controlled plebiscite on the constitution, as well as municipal elections to buttress its claims. [redacted]

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Regionally, we believe the Sandinistas will look for propaganda opportunities within the newly formed Contadora support group--composed of the left-of-center governments of Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, and Brazil. Managua lobbied hard for the formation of this advisory group, calculating, in our view, that "Latin Americanizing" the Central American conflict would help to counter perceived US efforts to thwart the pro-Nicaragua environment of the talks. The Sandinistas have consulted these countries frequently on the Contadora issue and almost certainly hope that the support group will back a treaty with less stringent enforcement provisions than sought by the other Central Americans. At the least, Managua believes the group will dilute what it regards as increasing US influence over the members of the original Contadora Nine [redacted]

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We expect the Sandinistas also will look for opportunities to influence the new governments scheduled to assume office in coming months in Honduras and Costa Rica. In recent press interviews, high-ranking Sandinista officials have indicated that they intend to exploit divisions in those countries over the presence of rebels. We expect Managua to further intensify its clandestine and overt propaganda efforts to pressure the new administrations to force the rebels out of their countries. [REDACTED]

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We believe the Nicaraguans consider the next few months to be critical not only for their war against the insurgents but also for their efforts to reverse public and Congressional opinion. The Sandinistas will continue to focus on the moral dimensions of US policy, especially rebel human rights violations. The regime probably will focus on proving that the rebels cannot win--even with US funding--thereby tapping Congressional concerns about a long-term commitment to the insurgents. [REDACTED]

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Moreover, we believe the Sandinistas may try to further internationalize the Nicaraguan issue in general and the peace talks in particular. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The regime will probably continue to calculate that an expanded number of players offers the best route to deflect US pressures and achieve an accord based more on general principles than linked to specific verification procedures and controls. Western Europe is the most likely target, in our view. Last year the French, for example, mediated border talks between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and Paris has consistently backed Managua against the US. The Sandinistas may also approach other countries either bilaterally or through the EC. They may also be tempted to try to move the talks to the more friendly confines of the United Nations, if they cannot avoid an unfavorable treaty. [REDACTED]

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